

Year B, November 25, 2018  
Last Sunday of Pentecost (Proper 29)  
Christ Church, Mexia

“John Wycliffe could be called the genesis of an era. Although the man has been virtually forgotten in our world today, this fourteenth-century saint was a stern and determined individual. He could not bear the thought that the Bible should remain chained to a pulpit in the dead language of the clergy and the prelates of the church. And so he set out as an English speaker to put into the English vernacular both the Old and New Testament.

It was a mammoth undertaking, and it was done against all kinds of verbal and physical assault upon him. Nevertheless, this faithful scholar, this preacher of righteousness stayed at the task until it was virtually completed. And then in bold defiance against the enemies of his day, he wrote these words in the flyleaf of that first English translation: ‘This Bible is translated and shall make possible a government of the people, by the people and for the people.’ ...”  
(Garver, *Our Christian Heritage*)

No doubt those words sound familiar to you because they were borrowed and used by President Lincoln in what has become known as his Gettysburg Address. So, you may ask, what does this have to do with Christ the King Sunday?

Well, sometimes we and others may think of Christ’s death as being caused because of religious reasons. That’s understandable because the Christian religion is firmly based upon his death and resurrection, and possibly because the Jewish leaders of that time started the ball rolling, so to speak. But Jesus was crucified because of political concerns. The Romans only crucified people who were enemies of the state, political threats. Actually, the Romans were very ecumenical and tolerated numerous religions, not only in Rome but also throughout the empire. Contrary to popular belief Christians were persecuted later by the Romans, not because of their religious beliefs, but because they were viewed as subversive to the Roman government – they claimed allegiance to someone other than Caesar.

This is the crux of the gospel passage today: “Are you the King of the Jews?” The Romans tolerated no kings except Caesar, and the ones they allowed to exist in conquered territories who pledged allegiance to Caesar, like Herod and his son who followed him. Pilate is looking

for the political reason to condemn Jesus. Claiming kingship would do it.

Another reason we may have difficulty viewing Jesus' death as political is that we believe in the separation of church and state. Our Bill of Rights sets forth: "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This gave rise to the sentiment, "separation of church and state." We could even quote scripture to support this separation. For example, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." or from the verses today, "My kingdom is not of this world." Without going into great detail, these texts do not mean what they have commonly been understood to mean. According to Marcus Borg (*Convictions*): "Jesus did not teach that religion and politics were separate, and Paul did not advocate unconditional obedience to political authority. Instead, both challenged the authorities of their time. That's why the Romans executed them."

Thus, while many view the Bible as religious, we must accept that it has political leanings as well, and not just because of the words Wycliffe placed onto the flyleaf of his translation. Essentially, "the Bible from beginning to end is a sustained protest against the domination systems of the ancient world." And by extension, they are relevant today. The political issues of the Bible – which are also religious issues – are about economic justice and fairness, peace and nonviolence. And so, as Christians, we need to be concerned with politics on earth, even though we follow the "King of kings." While God's kingdom "is not of this world," the hope is that it will come to this earth! That is the focus – that is the mission. We should NOT await the afterlife to enjoy God's dream for us. God's passion is that we change our ways now to be the kind of world God wants it to be. What does God's kingdom look like? That's what Jesus tried to demonstrate for us. Therefore, we must ensure that we understand the Bible and what it means for us.

As Marcus Borg notes; "Not every Christian is called to be a (political) activist. But all are called to take seriously God's dream for a more just and nonviolent world." But how do we do that?

In closing, I'd like to recall and suggest two things that may help to answer that question. First, from Martin Luther King, Jr.: "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state." We must speak "truth" to

power. As Christ said: "... for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth."

And because we need other people to accomplish such a mission, let's remember the words of Madeline L'Engle: "We draw people to Christ not by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it."

As we begin our new church year, let us each rededicate ourselves to let the light of Christ show in our lives as we strive for justice and peace – the justice and peace of God.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.  
Amen.